Neoliberal capitalism's bureaucracies of 'governance'

Abstract

The account of bureaucracy under neoliberal capitalism which I present in this article under the innocuous heading it prefers to use to describe itself ('governance') draws together recent critical work by David Graeber, Wendy Brown, William Davies and Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, which it repositions in relation to Jacques Rancière's conception of the 'police order'. The key claims of the new critique of bureaucracy thus delineated are: (i) that neoliberal capitalism's 'stealth revolution' (Brown) is primarily effected by way of a proliferation of bureaucracies; (ii) that these bureaucracies reconstruct the world as an array of 'overlapping competitions' (Davies); (iii) that competitive hierarchisation ('ranking') is the key bureaucratic form, or process, in each of these administrative fiefdoms. To this new critique I add a Derridean reflection on the longstanding mystical or metaphysical appeal of hierarchy and also argue that bureaucratic organisation is the mundane way in which an anti-democratic commitment to hierarchy becomes naturalised. To understand the continuity between the administrative and coercive dimensions of the police order of governance I draw on work in critical criminology on 'the new punitiveness' and scholarship from critical security studies which views security professionals as experts in the governmental management of '(in)security'. I suggest that the massive production of insecurity by proliferating bureaucracies which structure neoliberalism's project of competitive hierarchisation creates the ideal conditions for a vicious circle of securitarian inflation.

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Neoliberalism was initially theorised, in the 1930s and 40s, in particular by Friedrich Hayek, as an antidote to the bureaucracy and coercion of totalitarian states.[1] Competition within free markets was prized by early neoliberal theorists as an alternative framework for co-ordinating productive social activity, which minimized the need for planning and enforcement from above by an overbearing state and its agencies. The entrepreneur, neoliberalism's heroic subject, was envisaged in Romantic fashion by Joseph Schumpeter as an anti-bureaucratic visionary who sees past the regulations and conventions of the day, an exceptional figure who redefines the game and rewrites the rules, yet whose competitive fervour nevertheless stops a conventional hair's breadth short in its expression from the coercive instinct it sublimates.[2]

Yet 'applied' neoliberalism, since the 1970s, has departed significantly from both the anti-bureaucratic and the anti-coercive principles of its theoretical inception and these two departures are related.[3] My argument draws on insights from recent studies by David Graeber, Wendy Brown, William Davies and a co-authored book much indebted to Brown in its discussion of 'governance', by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval.[4] I reconstruct this body of thought as an emergent 'new critique' of bureaucracy, which is to applied neoliberalism what Herbert Marcuse's classic neo-Weberian critique of bureaucracy was to the conformist strictures of redistributive welfarist societies of the 1950s and 60s. I suggest that Jacques Rancière's political thought anticipated two of the key claims made by this new critique: the suppression of democratic politics – the 'undoing' of the demos – by bureaucratic-administrative 'governance' and the continuity of coercive with bureaucratic power ('police are bureaucrats with weapons').[5] These are both, I argue, key facets of Rancière's theorisation of the 'police order' as a spectrum of administrative and coercive powers opposed in their principle to democratic politics in the radical sense of the term. It is not altogether surprising that radical democracy, as a concept and practice of heterarchy, stands

opposed in principle to the hierarchies of the police order but in this article I seek to show in more detail how the techniques of neoliberal bureaucracy work to contain and suppress politics.

Neoliberalism's proliferating bureaucracies

Graeber begins his attempt to revive the Left's critique of bureaucracy by remarking on the paradox that whereas in the late 1960s and early 70s, talk of 'bureaucracy' suffused countercultural and social protest movements, today, by contrast, few seem to think the subject worth discussing even though its real presence in the daily lives of almost everyone has, he claims, become more onerous than ever.[6] We may not think of the hours wasted waiting to speak to geographically distant telephone call centre operatives before progressing slowly through their automated flowchart of questions as an encounter with 'bureaucracy', still less the bureaucracy of neoliberalism, yet Graeber's point is that we should see them as precisely this.[7] These hours wasted are, in Graeber's analysis, today's equivalent of the endless petitioning and placating of petty officials in their byzantine hierarchies, the lurking ever-so-humbly outside dingy offices that constitute our cultural understanding of the bureaucracy of an earlier era as it was formed by the novels of Dostoevsky, Bulgakov and Kafka, among others, and their many reelaborations in popular culture. Graeber reminds us pointedly that 'bureaucracy' is not just something foreign that other people once had to confront before we all had computers. Rather, neoliberalism has ushered in here – everywhere, globally – a proliferation of invasive and time-consuming evaluative processes, sufficiently compliant participation in which is compulsory if one wishes to access key goods and services today. There just is no way to get an engineer to come and fix my faulty broadband in Leamington Spa other than by jumping through all of the hoops in the order they are presented to me by an operative in a call-centre somewhere thousands of miles away and manifesting a sufficient degree of compliant engagement. Even then, there may be days of waiting and there will be no point changing supplier because all suppliers in this 'free' market have adopted substantially the same approach to managing the 'care' of their customers. There will be a similar rigmarole if I want to apply for a mortgage, as the banks delegate their 'due diligence' to an army of proletarianised telephone labourers: not only is revenue extracted through the state instrument of taxation diverted into the private coffers of the banks but we then pay a second time for their subprime speculation as we endure, over many hours, the bureaucratically managed form of the 'due diligence' which the governing elite of elected representatives saw fit to put in place after the subprime crisis. The lamentable consequences for the beleagured subject may be enough to make us yearn nostalgically for the dingy corridors and byzantine clerkdom of nineteenth-century bureaucracy.

The very act of identifying and naming neoliberal bureaucracy by gathering diverse experiences from everyday life and contemporary work under this heading is, as Graeber realises, a politically significant move in so far as it constitutes as a single topic for discussion an array of experiences which only exist as scattered, disparate and incidental or accidental irritations, to the limited extent their existence is even registered at all. Graeber's passingly cranky but resolute focus on the subject's perspective in this most anecdotal part of his analysis constitutes, in my view, the most incisive and significant dimension of his new critique of bureaucracy: notwithstanding the unparalleled freedom we are said to enjoy in the official discourse – freedom to trade, speak, love and consume as we individually choose – our lives are more than ever taken up navigating and servicing bureaucratic processes.

In the less anecdotal part of his argument, Graeber emphasises the fictionality of the economic 'deregulation' called for from the Right by pointing out that 'free' markets are in fact extensively underwritten by minutely detailed trade agreements, rules and treaties.[8] Though true, the fact that neoliberalism's 'free' markets rest on a profusion of deliberate and detailed regulation has long been acknowledged, including by some of its earliest theorists such as Louis Rougier, convenor of the seminal Walter Lippmann colloquium of 1938.[9] Neoliberalism functions in its 'applied' phase, as Davies remarks, by '[v]iewing the world "like" a market, and governing it "as if" it were a market'.[10] Rather than the nostalgic and rhetorical 'freedom' often claimed on behalf of these markets, he argues that it is the technical and scientific 'forms of economization, calculation, measurement and valuation' which constitute this *seeing as* and *governing as if*, the 'devices and measures […] used to drive market-like behaviour and performance evaluation further into society and politics' that are most distinctively characteristic of neoliberalism.[11] Marketisation – *seeing as* and *governing as if* the world were a set of markets – requires 'new breeds of expert coach, regulator, risk manager, strategist, guru' who are 'able to represent the world in numerical hierarchies of relative worth' and who thereby 'construct and help navigate a world of constant, overlapping competitions'.[12] These experts are neoliberalism's army of 'helping hands'.[13] The techniques of measurement and evaluation they develop, wield, champion and propagate form the regulatory bureaucratic backbone of neoliberalism's reconstruction of the entire world as a set of overlapping competitive markets. These are the techniques which are constitutive of the competitive game and which determine how the hierarchy of winners and losers will be derived.

Graeber writes of 'the bureaucratic techniques (performance reviews, focus groups, time allocation surveys…) developed in financial and corporate circles' and which gradually 'came to invade the rest of society – education, science, government – and eventually, to pervade almost every aspect of everyday life.'[14] He is cutting in his criticism of the 'peculiar idiom' that emerged in such corporate circles before spreading, virus-like, everywhere: a language 'full of bright, empty terms like vision, quality, stakeholder, leadership, excellence, innovation, strategic goals, or best practices.'[15] Graeber imagines representing every document using one of these terms by a blue dot on a map:

> We would be able to observe this new corporate bureaucratic culture spread like blue stains in a petri dish, starting in the financial districts, on to boardrooms, then government offices and universities, then, finally, engulfing any location where any number of people gather to discuss the allocation of resources of any kind at all.[16]

Brown also stresses the performative work of language, to be precise the language of 'governance', in the 'undoing' of democratic politics. Such language and the worldview it reflects and instantiates tend to replace properly political deliberation and decision-making with supposedly objective bureaucratic procedures, metrics and managerial practices. Brown analyses with great acuity the significance of this one particular term in the 'peculiar idiom' of neoliberal bureaucracy, and its associated techniques and practices, in constituting bureaucracy's 'antipolitics'.[17] 'Governance' has risen to prominence 'in politics, business, public agencies, NGOs, and nonprofits, along with the social sciences that study them, including sociology, economics, political science, business, anthropology, and education and social welfare schools'.[18] Analysing this trend, Brown argues:

> "Governance" is often used interchangeably with both "governing" and "managing" across a range of institutions – political, economic, educational, profit, non-profit, service and production industries. This interchangeability and promiscuity suggest that governance comprises and indexes and important fusion of political and business practices, both at the level of administration and at the level of providing goods and services.[19]

The language of administrative governance expresses the transformation of political debates into managerial problems, or in Rancière's terms the absorption of democratic politics into the police order. If the bureaucratic measuring and ranking procedures of neoliberal 'governance' have succeeded in spreading so rampantly into 'spheres and activities heretofore governed by other tables of value', including politics, this is partly because they plug into and exacerbate a confusion of politics with administration which has become increasingly prevalent in liberal democracies.[20] 'Governance' is administrative and managerial – bureaucratic – in concept and practice: it relies on the transmission of instructions down a fixed hierarchy of command which it establishes, codifies and regulates. It is easy to mistake the institutional machinery of representative politics, as it operates in liberal democracies, for such a hierarchy of command, as Rancière suggests:

> Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. I propose to call it *the police*.[21]

'Above all', Brown argues, 'governance reconceives the political as a field of management or administration'.[22] I would suggest that 'governance' in this sense is neoliberalism's exacerbation of the propensity to misidentify policing as politics which has long bedevilled liberal democracy and its theorists. 'Governance' names neoliberalism's police order, in the sense that:

> The police is […] first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.[23]

Consequently, while some of the techniques and combinations thereof which constitute neoliberalism's regime of 'governance' may be novel and while the proliferating expansionism of its bureaucracies may be unprecedented, democratic politics in the radical, rather than the merely representative, sense has always and everywhere existed in tension with the administrated distribution of places and parts which the police order names. Even if we, as individuals or collectives, currently lack effective forms of democratic challenge to the 'stealth revolution' which neoliberalism in its applied phase has been conducting 'termite-like', there is reason to remind ourselves that its 'governance' is simply another police order: neoliberalism may intensify and hyper-rationalise, but it did not invent, the stratification and inequality it celebrates obversely as competition and nor did it begin the undoing of the demos, for the police order was already expressed in the representative political arrangements of liberal democracies.[24]

Brown's analysis of one particular technique of neoliberal 'governance', namely 'best practices', demonstrates how the insidious constraining power of this bureaucratic police order takes effect in the workplace: 'Best practices connote both expertise and neutrality; they emerge from and cite research, as well as frame it. Their authority and legitimacy is corroborated through replacing rigid rules and top-down commands with organically gestated procedures validated by experience and success.'[25] Qualifying such practices as 'best' not only lends them an air of authority derived from experience but means they are effectively obligatory, at least in the sense that a robust justification can be demanded of any and every derogation. As they solidify into institutional 'processes' and 'procedures', 'best practices' are the expected bureaucratic automatisms that increasingly diminish room for professional judgment and discretion in the work of the middle classes, bringing the repetitive drudgery Bernard Stiegler (after Marx and Debord) calls 'proletarianisation' to their labour, just as factory production lines and the scripts of call-centre operatives have proletarianised working-class labour.[26] The dissolution of professional judgment in the universal solvent of actuarial risk-management and the rigid 'processes' it informs is only very gradually becoming the focus of collective resistance, for example in the movement of French middle-class professionals calling itself the 'Appel des Appels'.[27] Whereas Schumpeter's hero of neoliberalism, the entrepreneur, reinvents the rules of the game, for the vast majority of workers departure from the 'best practices' enshrined in the bureaucracy of 'governance' is distinctly hazardous. Although lionised as a matter of ritual, the rule-reinventing entrepreneur was always – by definition – a figure of exception; in the era of applied neoliberalism it is more apparent than ever that what is still expected of the many is simply brutish obedience to those rules, policies, processes and procedures which circumscribe their role in the hierarchy of governance. Entrepreneurial trailblazing and its rewards for the exceptional few; proletarianisation for the many, whose individual performance, productivity and 'compliance' are monitored ever more closely.

It may be objected that there is nothing wrong with trying to maximise functional efficiency in the workplace. However, Graeber and Brown both suggest that the distinctively problematic characteristic of applied neoliberalism is that its bureaucratic apparatus proliferates well beyond the workplace, or indeed 'workplaces'. Just as for many the lived reality of working life is of two or more 'workplaces', each with its own set of rules and procedures, so it is vital to recognise the *proliferation* of bureaucracies under neoliberalism. In the era of what Graeber terms 'total bureaucratisation' every utility company, train 'operator', mobile network, broadband provider, bank, manufacturer, retail chain, university, broadcaster, celebrity, expert, government department, hospital and medical practice runs its own bureaucratic, advertising and 'Comms', or 'messaging', operation. These bureaucracies seek to minimise their own costs by transfering as much of the burden of interactions to the consumer, which usually translates into waiting time and the almost ubiquitous need to 'chase' even the most straightforward matter. Neoliberalism's doctrine of free market enterprise determines that this proliferation of bureaucratic fiefdoms be encouraged without regulation of its cumulative effects, even though almost nobody really wants to 'shop around' for their electricity or their train tickets. Under neoliberalism, all of these bureaucratic fiefdoms are relentlessly spinning, messaging and managing, competing for our limited and diminishing reserves of attention and spending-power as consumers or 'service-users'. The only unification, consolidation and sifting of this onslaught of verbiage that there is takes place at the subjective pole. Such dumping of pseudo-communicative dross on the subject's head is unprecedented in the history of humanity in its quantity and cumulative intensity. If in the workplace(s) 'total bureaucratisation' means proletarianising obedience to the proliferation of best practices, in the world beyond it involves flooding the subject's

attentional, temporal, cognitive and affective field with the proliferating products of other bureaucratic fiefdoms, all of which are similarly pushed into overdrive by the imperative placed on their members to win in the game of competitive hierarchisation.

What 'gives' is ultimately the subject. Bureaucracy in the singular may appeal, as Graeber suggests, because the rules of its 'game' allow for codified interactions that economise on empathic energy and spare subjects the anxiety of relatively openended and unscripted 'play'.[28] However, in their proliferating plurality, the bureaucracies of neoliberalism which structure 'a world of constant, overlapping competitions', are cumulatively anxiogenic rather than anxiolytic.[29] Even for those who are 'successful' in some areas, there simply is no way of succeeding in all of these competitions and nor does the machinery offer an easy way of attenuating the cumulative effects of the inevitable and multiple failures. When the imperative to competitive hierarchisation also spills over into social relationships and 'reality' television reconstructs cooking, conviviality and subsistence as so many contests of competitive elimination, the urge to win is accompanied by a generalised anxiety about the stigmatizing effects of failure. Davies calls this 'the depressive-competitive disorder of neoliberalism' and notes that its imperative to optimise afflicts 'winners' as well as 'losers': 'Very rich, very successful, very healthy firms or people could, and *should*, become even more so.'[30] In Davies's incisive critique of the 'happiness industry', his term for neoliberal capitalism's attempt to diagnose, treat and in so doing even to make money from its own pathologies, he notes that the hard economic cost of mental health conditions - estimated at 3-4% of GDP in Europe and North America - has forced the matter of 'well-being' to the attention of even the most temperamentally unfeeling employers and policy-makers.[31] His analysis suggests that the imperative to compete in so many different domains simultaneously and the impossibility of 'winning' in more than a few areas creates generalised misery, anxiety and insecurity. The question I address in the next section is why, given that competitive hierarchisation in overdrive is so cumulatively toxic, even for those who are sometimes recognized as 'winners', it has not been more effectively resisted.

Hierarchy: mystique and mundane reality

Staggering and widening income differentials between today's senior managers and the lowest paid workers in the same organisations are only occasionally challenged and justified but routinely accepted. The rare challenges tend to be framed in rational-functionalist terms and to be answered by justifications which try to compensate for their lack of persuasiveness in those terms with a good helping of what organisation studies scholar Thomas Diefenbach calls 'leadership mystique'.[32] Orthodox thinking on leadership and management of the sort promulgated by MBA programmes and corporate training professionals portrays managers as 'skilful and competent superiors' but this, he argues, is mostly mystification: 'There is a conscious and unconscious mystification of people higher up organisational hierarchies or societal class systems simply because they are higher up in the hierarchy.'[33] When it comes to pay, any organisation that proposed to remunerate its workers more equitably would arouse outright suspicion for defying what has solidified into an unstated but rigorously respected convention of good corporate governance. In the applied phase of neoliberalism the most flagrant inequality has become deeply entrenched in public and private organisations alike, where it directly expresses – and is a less palatable synonym for – neoliberalism's ruling ethic and primary mode of operation: competition, or more precisely competitive hierarchisation. Economic inequality, the principle and product of competitive hierarchisation, has widened significantly in the half century since neoliberalism entered its

'applied' phase: as Brown observes, while the very top stratum 'acquires and retains ever more wealth, the very bottom is literally turned out on to the streets or into the growing urban and suburban slums of the world, while the middle strata work more hours for less pay, fewer benefits, less security, and less promise of retirement or upward mobility than at any time in the past half century'.[34]

The mesmeric hold which neoliberalism's staunch commitment to competitive hierarchisation continues to exert, despite its fallout in - or obverse as - increasingly marked inequality, demands critical analysis.[35] Most exisiting explanations focus on the lure of competitive striving yet hierarchy per se also has a specific appeal that should not be underestimated. Hierarchy has a mystique, a power of enchantment: 'hierarchy' etymologically and historically refers to structures of religious or spiritual governing, yet even in its pared-down neoliberal manifestation as brute ranking it retains the notion of graduated vertical ascent. Hierarchy is something to which human beings are drawn because our cultures mainly represent it to us in terms of moving upwards on a vertical axis and there is something metaphysically appealing about this form of movement. The culturally very insistent confusion of vertical ascent with value, whereby high is good and low is bad, can be understood as a nexus of deeply ingrained oppositions which inform and constrain thinking and feeling within what Jacques Derrida called the 'metaphysical' tradition. These oppositions are expressed in ordinary linguistic usage: the terms 'superior' and 'inferior' are simultaneously positional and evaluative. Hierarchy appeals because it draws on an array of very ingrained and mutually reinforcing habits of thought and feeling: a certain postural representation of the human lifecourse and evolutionary history, of phallic power and the superiority of masculine over feminine gender, of the mind over the body (and relatedly of the intellect over the senses and of cognitive over manual labour), of logical-rational thinking as subsumption in the upward movement from concrete particulars to abstract categories and in the elevation of the dialectic (*Aufhebung* or *relève* – 'raising up', to emphasise one of several meanings resonant in Derrida's translation of this key Hegelian term into French), of historical and technological progress as 'onward and upward' movement and even an intuitive grasp of bodily cleanliness and the elevating transformation of base drives into art and civilised values that Freud jokingly characterised as sublimation.[36] This nexus, the elements of which I shall review in turn, has proved extremely effective in deflecting the demand for equality and it is this nexus which helps explain the appeal of neoliberalism's commitment to competitive hierarchisation. This metaphysical nexus undergirds the pervasive religious representation of hierarchy as a vertical axis of value: paradise above, hell below.

Human infants typically crawl on all fours before rising to their hind legs and this elevation seems to repeat individually the evolutionary progress of the species and confirm our superiority over the other animals. In her deconstructive reading, Monique Schneider identifies, in Freud's account of that rising to upright posture in *Civilization and Its Discontents* [1930], a culturally pervasive gendered association between postural elevation, severance from a horizontal realm in which touch and smell predominated to one in which vision and hearing are paramount.[37] She further shows that Freud misconstrues the transition to upright posture by the individual and the species as a move from the feminine to the masculine: from 'feminine' senses of immediacy to 'masculine' senses of distance, from the 'feminine' realm of instinct and feeling to the 'masculine' realm of rational thought. Schneider accordingly demonstrates that this understanding of child development and evolutionary history – clearly discernible in Freud's work but by no means limited to Freud, whose thinking she treats here as symptomatic of wider cultural patterning – is suffused with

an unacknowledged but very insistent gendering, in which the verticality of upright posture is associated with the masculine, the abstract, the rational and the divine through a network of phallic-erectile figures. In the implicit privileging of masculinity Schneider discerns, movement up the vertical axis is privileged. In *Glas* (1974) Derrida suggests that the double columnar form he purloins from *Ce qui reste d'un Rembrandt* and Genet's writing more generally reveal the culturally ingrained association of downward movement with excrement and death: that which falls (*tombe*) towards the tomb (*tombeau*).[38] Julia Kristeva's theorisation of the abject also associates downward movement with bodily excreta and the body as excrement: 'Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver'.[39] In Jean-Luc Nancy's *Corpus*, the body as envisaged in the metaphysical tradition is similarly that which is apt to fall (*cadere*) from its verticality to its prone form, the cadaver.[40] Body falls; mind or spirit rises.

Allegories of the body politic tend to redouble this power of elevation and further consolidate the intuitive appeal of hierarchy: one such story, related by Livy, reread by Pierre-Simon Ballanche in the 1830s and subsequently remarked by Rancière, was told by Menenius Agrippa to the plebs who had withdrawn their labour from Ancient Rome.[41] Agrippa represented the patrician senators as the stomach and the plebs as the limbs, thus uniting them in the collaborative fictional harmony of an organic body politic. Flimsy or risible though it may seem, it brought an end to the revolt; as an allegory of government, the story does at least presuppose a degree of interdependence between classes or castes rather than unidirectional command and domination. Far more often in such allegories it is the head that corresponds to the governing part: 'head' as 'Head', *chef* as *chief*, uppermost.

Crawling/walking, smell/sight, touch/hearing, shit/cleanliness, death/life, body/spirit, inferior/superior: interconnecting oppositions of thought and feeling which all seem to confirm the valuation of upward movement and thereby lend an aura of inevitability to hierarchy. When Derrida yearns, in *Glas*, for 'a non-Hegelian staircase', he seeks an undoing of this mystical - or 'metaphysical' - nexus of hierarchy.[42] As does Rancière when his Joseph Jacotot tries to replace the old 'progressive' pedagogy's explanatory movement upwards, from one explanation to the next of greater sophistication, with a horizontal insistence on intellectual equality and a method of learning which merges the sensory with the intellectual in *tâtonnement*, an autodidactic groping for and grasping of subjects (*matières*) in their materiality.[43] Jacotot's emancipatory classroom, as Rancière reimagines it, shows that one major by-product (side-effect or collateral effect) of schooling is the social reproduction of hierarchy's mystique: alongside what it professes and usually wishes to teach it also teaches the yearning for ascent and the inevitability of inequality in the progression of its explanations, the rankings of its testing and its very form as an institution comprised of differentiated strata of age and ability through which students must elevate themselves.[44]

The metaphysical confusions which constitute its mystique are so entrenched that hierarchy has very often seemed like common sense or natural fact: there just are leaders and followers, managers and subordinates, rich and poor and that is that. Neoliberalism's core procedure of competitive hierarchisation plugs into this culturally very entrenched and imbricated mystique of hierarchy. Given the right combination of circumstances, however, it does not take much for this knotted bundle (*fascis*) of misleading half-truths to begin to unravel. The declaration of equality – as voiced in the French Revolution, for example – can cut clean through enough of the ties of its apparent self-evidence to bring a highly stratified society crashing down in blood and flames with its own trenchantly simple calculus of arithmetic

equality, according to which everyone counts equally as one and, then as now, deserves a fair and equal share. Against this heterarchic egalitarian demand of democratic politics is pitted a continuous collateral reproduction of hierarchy and its mystique, the mundane reality of which is the existence of bureaucratic institutions to the near-complete exclusion of other forms of human organisation.

Bureaucracies, Weber noted, are essentially rather than incidentally hierarchical: the efficient running of bureaucratic machinery requires that the roles and functions of its individual components be carefully defined and their interrelationship be precisely specified in a reliable and predictable way according to calculable rules.[45] Even in the most horizontally structured public and private bureaucracies with the least overtly hierarchical working arrangements, power still mainly flows vertically.[46] More authentically horizontal organisations – co-operatives, colleges in the old academic sense, or what Elliot Jaques terms 'associations' – are not bureaucracies in Weber's sense and today they are very much the exception rather than the rule.[47] All bureaucracies are institutions of hierarchy: alongside the specific purpose of any particular bureaucracy, every bureaucracy also embodies and naturalises hierarchy. Every bureaucracy also produces, as a factory pumps out smoke as a by-product, the naturalisation of hierarchy and specifically a hierarchy of the value of human beings, brazenly translated under neoliberalism into one of remuneration, whereby those at the top are worth more than those at the bottom.

It is no longer the army but rather the bureaucracies of governance which are the principal form in which hierarchical organisation is naturalised as common sense. That some are destined to command and others to obey, that some are to govern while others are to be governed, that some deserve fast cars and fancy holidays but others a lifetime of grinding poverty – to promote such flagrant inequality may not be the stated mission of many, or any, bureaucratic organisations. However, all such inequality draws strength, a feeling of naturalness and inevitability, from the fact that bureaucracies instantiate and reproduce hierarchy as idea and ideal, as by-product, side-effect or collateral reality. Foucault described disciplinary institutions – army barracks, convents, reformatories, asylums and the like – as 'islets' that had sprung up in the social sea in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, islets which gradually joined together to form an 'archipelago', a network of rigidity where there had been flux.[48] There are so many more bureaucracies than there ever were disciplinary institutions. Each bureaucracy projects its hierarchical order of governance; together, they form less an archipelago scattered across the sea than the hard ground of common sense on which we stand, a rigid new continent risen up high above the flux it supplanted.

In her trenchant egalitarian critique of bureaucracy, Elizabeth Anderson differentiates between three types of hierarchy:

> hierarchies of *standing*, whereby those at the top are entitled to make claims on others in their own right, and to enjoy rights and privileges, while those below are denied rights or granted an inferior set of rights and privileges, and denied voice to make claims on their own, or given an inferior forum in which to make their claims. There are hierarchies of *esteem*, whereby those on the top command honour and admiration, while those below are stigmatized and held in contempt, as objects of ridicule, loathing, or disgust. And there are hierarchies of *command*, of domination and subordination, whereby those at the top issue orders to those below, who must defer and obey.[49]

Some social hierarchies may combine two or more of these types of hiearchical relationship: feudalism, for example, combines all three. Bureaucracies are necessarily hierarchies of command, in that they are functionally constituted by relationships between managers and subordinates, but they need not also be hierarchies of standing and esteem and it is for this reason that Anderson can conclude her analysis by giving 'two egalitarian cheers' for bureaucracy, in particular in so far as bureaucracy substitutes administrative domination for what Weber termed 'patrimonial' (patron-client) domination. While Anderson's 'two cheers' may have been a merited celebration of the transformations Weber described, I would argue that the creeping reassertion of hierarchies of standing and esteem behind and within the functional hierarchy of command is a characteristic of applied neoliberalism and its norms of corporate governance. Senior managers increasingly represent and constitute themselves as a superior caste and the stark remuneration differential between top and the bottom, as well as decreased upward mobility within organisations and societies, seems to confirm their otherworldly preeminence. In this way, neoliberalism draws very deftly on the mystique of hierarchy, constituting a superior priestly caste destined to govern, tending to restore and unify the three types of hierarchy into one of worth expressed along a vertical axis. For their part Dardot and Laval offer the following comments on the process of caste-formation by the world's wealthiest 1% and their senior-managerial elite:

> There is no longer *anything* in common between what the majority of people live, feel and think and what is perceived and understood of the situation by those who dominate from the isolation of their hermetically-sealed bubble, not even the requisite minimum for a sharing of experience.[50]

> The same universities, the same ideological references, the same entourage: an entire 'milieu' has developed to support the system of power for which the working classes do not exist at all, except when they make their presence felt by their unfortunate way of voting, in which case they need a heartfelt *lecture* so they better understand the reasons behind their suffering.[51]

This consolidation of an oligarchic governing elite under neoliberalism tends to effect a regressive realignment of mundane-social with mystical-sacred hierachies: 'It's easy to see the grand cosmic hierarchies of late Antiquity, with their archons, planets, and gods, all operating under the unfolding of abstract rational laws, as simply images of the Roman legal bureaucratic order writ very, very large'[52], Graeber argues, adding that a vestige of this order survived for hundreds of years after the fall of Rome in the medieval Chain of Being, 'a virtual celestial bureaucracy, based distantly on that of ancient Rome, which was seen as the embodiment of cosmic rationality'.[53] If the cosmos no longer reflects back our earthly bureaucratic hierarchies in quite the same way, there are the psy-sciences and their therapeutic offshoots to remind us of the inevitability of hierarchy. Foucault's lectures on psychiatric power, which he characterises as 'above all a certain way of managing, of administering', suggest that the paradigmatic psychiatric cure is *to know one's place* in a social order construed as a hierarchy of persons.[54] In Leuret's account of his cure of a M. Dupré, published in 1840 and, according to Foucault, the most extensive narration of any such psychiatric cure from the early history of the discipline in the first forty or so years of the nineteenth century, the 'cure' involves a punitively-backed learning and recitation of the names of the doctor, his students, the auxiliaries and nurses and giving to each the proper, respectful, greeting: 'this learning of names will, at the same time, be the learning of hierarchy'.[55] The cure was conceived as a way of 'putting the subject back in contact with

language inasmuch as it is the carrier of imperatives', of reacquainting the subject with language as the medium of what Anderson terms the hierarchy of command but it also involved reasserting hierarchies of esteem and standing by teaching the subject to attach the appropriate names, greetings and affects to the asylum staff, each according to their social and institutional position.[56] Thus the discipline of the cure offered a secular therapeutic re-education in the mystique of hierarchy's sacrosanct order of governance.

Producing and managing insecurity

In abnegation of its theroetical inception, applied neoliberalism is becoming increasingly bureaucratic and coercive. Criminologists have drawn attention to the advent of a 'new punititiveness' broadly co-incident with neoliberalism's entry into its applied phase.[57] Indicative of this trend is the fact that whereas fewer than 25,000 people were imprisoned in France in 1975, by 2014 the number was close to 70,000.[58] The rate of incarceration has doubled over the same period in France, Italy and Belgium, tripled in England and Sweden and the Netherlands and quadrupled in the United States.[59] As Didier Fassin has shown in the case of France, this expansion of the prison population is facilitated by greatly increasing the penalities for acts of petty criminality and the vigour with which they are policed and prosecuted, in particular minor victimless driving offences and drugs violations, at the expense of large-scale banking and financial fraud.[60] As Fassin has shown for France and Michelle Alexander and Loïc Wacquant for the United States, this way of tightening the criminal justice dragnet disproportionately targets ethnically and socially marginalised populations, so much so that prison is revealed with increasing clarity as 'an instrument for the management of inequalities'.[61]

Just as disciplinary techniques were said by Michel Foucault to be the coercive counterpart of nineteenth-century economic and political liberalism, so neoliberalism's securitian punitiveness is the obverse of its entrepreneurial freedom to compete for self-enrichment for those at the very bottom of the social hierarchy.[62] As Wacquant has shown, *neo*liberalism has ushered in a coercive governance of poverty by imprisonment which functions by 'wasting' those confined to it: containment and punishment now prevail over rehabilitation in a way that would have shocked many nineteenth-century theorists of the disciplinary institution: 'In lieu of the *dressage* ("training" or "taming") intended to fashion "docile and productive bodies" postulated by Foucault, the contemporary prison is geared toward brute neutralization, rote retribution, and simple warehousing – by default, if not by design.'[63] There is a connection between this new punitiveness directed against the poorest and most marginalised (stigmatized as 'losers') and the imperative to 'win' in the competitive hierarchisation which operates as a defining principle of neoliberalism. It would be naïve to dismiss this extension of punishment for those at the bottom of the social hiearchy as merely an incidental correlation. That those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised are also those who are most coercively treated and comprehensively harrassed is to be expected. There is one obvious way in which the security industry benefits from widening inequality: the richest seek to protect their accumulated wealth from a growing mass who can barely afford to feed themselves. So flagrant and spectacular is the inequality now on display in the juxtaposition of rich and poor, not only internationally in the divide between developed and developing nations but also nationally in countries of both categories, that a proliferation of security techniques and officials are needed simply to ensure the survival of this system from one day to the next.

As Graeber notes, the strictures of neoliberalism's proliferating bureaucracies are increasingly backed by the reality or threat of coercion, which may become more implicit as one ascends the social hierarchy but which is nevertheless present at all levels:

> The bureaucratization of daily life means the imposition of impersonal rules and regulations; impersonal rules and regulations, in turn, can only operate if they are backed up by the threat of force. And indeed, in this most recent phase of total bureaucratization, we've seen security cameras, police scooters, issuers of temporary ID cards, and men and women in a variety of uniforms acting in either public or private capacities, trained in tactics of menacing, intimidation, and ultimately deploying physical volence, appear just about everywhere – even in places such as playgrounds, primary schools, college campuses, hospitals, libraries, parks, or beach resorts, where fifty years ago their presence would have been considered scandalous, or simply weird.[64]

Alongside the proliferation of bureaucracies under neoliberalism and anchoring their particular requirements, Graeber identifies an extension of hard policing and an extension of ideological representation encouraging citizens to see the world from the perspective of the police. Although there may be fewer uniformed police visible on our streets over recent decades, there has been exponential growth in the number of private or security agencies which can, in the last instance, call on these state agencies alongside which they work in tandem as an articulated security network; and the airwaves are filled with police dramas and all manner of police-procedural television dramas.

Neoliberal economic doctrine demands the deliberate production of inequality and insecurity in the field of employment (although its 'helping hands' prefer to speak of fostering competition and valuing flexibility), which has as principal side-effect the production on a mass scale of a generalised compensatory desire for security.[65] This yearning for the restoration of the status quo ante with respect to security of employment and the manifold stabilities which tend to follow from it is now blocked in that neoliberalism is resolutely opposed to that kind of socio-economic security. Because changes to employment conditions tend to affect all manner of other subjective arrangements and dispositions and this yearning for security is blocked in the domain in which it first arose, a generalised and free-floating desire for security (or anxiety about insecurity) is produced which readily attaches itself to other issues and objects. Critical security studies, in particular the work of the 'Paris school' around Didier Bigo, has shown persuasively that '(in)security professionals' are not unambiguously agents for a safer society but also expert professional managers and producers of the anxiety of insecurity.[66] These '(in)security professionals' are not only subject to the very same pressures of competitive hierarchisation as other workers under neoliberalism and thereby pushed into overdrive by the need to 'win' in an arena in which very few elected representatives have the knowledge, access to information or political will to challenge their authority, but they also benefit from the wider population's generalised and free-floating yearning for greater security, for which they supply objects, patterns and narratives of investment. These are favourable conditions not only for generalised acquiescence to the ever more elaborate and costly techniques of coercive governance which are supposed to keep us all safe – costly in economic but also juridical and political terms, in rights, freedoms and real democracy – but also for the establishment of a vicious circle of securitarian inflation: the historical irony of applied neoliberalism's becoming-totalitarian.

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‘Domination is transfigured into administration’, Marcuse observed in his classic critique of bureaucracy.[67] In the era of applied neoliberalism, proliferating bureaucracies not only continue to extend their administrative form of domination – supplying the structure in ‘structural violence’ – by remaking the world as a series of overlapping competitions, but they call increasingly on securitarian solutions, on strategies of containment and coercion, most especially against those who have already shown themselves to be the least successful in economic terms. This police order undertakes the mass surveillance and ‘profiling’ of its citizens in an attempt to govern not only the present but the future and will increasingly have recourse to the reassuringly predictable effects of lethal pre-emptive violence against those who resist its logic. In this article I have tried to reconstruct a coherent account of neoliberal capitalism’s bureaucracies of governance from key insights by Graeber, Brown, Davies, Rancière and Dardot and Laval. I have suggested that neoliberalism’s proliferating bureaucracies have flourished to the extent that they draw on and celebrate the mystique of hierarchy. The administrative language of governance and its associated technical practices codify an increasingly rigid framework of rule-bound hierarchical organisation, a form of ‘proletarianisation’ in the workplace which tends to spill over into wider social life. Today’s proliferation of bureauratic fiefdoms, which conspire to organise competitions everywhere dump a torrent of hectoring pseudo-communication on the heads of increasingly time-poor subjects who are set up by the imperative to competitive hierarchisation to experience anxiety about insecurity and the stigma of failure in almost every area of their lives. (In)security professionals are exposed to these same pressures, while also finding abundant resources in an ambient sense of insecurity for their ever more exorbitant promises of safety and ever more elaborate, costly and coercive schemes for reducing risk.

[1] William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*, London, Sage, 2014, pp39–40.
[2] Ibid., p69, pp51–2.
[3] Ibid., p29.
[4] David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*, London, Melville House, 2015; Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, New York, Zone Books, 2015; Pierre Dardot & Christian Laval, *Ce Cauchemar qui n'en finit pas: comment le néolibéralisme défait la démocratie*, La Découverte, 2016. For the debt to Brown's discussion see, in particular, p129.
[5] Graeber, *Utopia*, p73.
[6] Graeber, *Utopia*, pp3–4.
[7] Ibid., p4.
[8] Ibid., pp17–18.
[9] Rougier distinguished between the withdrawal of the state characteristic of nineteenth-century laissez-faire liberalism and neoliberalism, in which the state would intervene but primarily to create a legislative framework conducive to competitive private enterprise. As Dardot and Laval note, 'Cet interventionnisme *juridique* de l'État s'oppose à un interventionnisme *administratif* qui gêne ou empêche la liberté d'action des entreprises.' Dardot & Laval, *La Nouvelle Raison du monde: essai sur la société néolibérale*, Paris, La Découverte, 2009, p166.
[10] Davies, *Neoliberalism*, p21.
[11] Ibid., pp21–2.
[12] Ibid., pp29–30.
[13] The quiet work of these implacable bureaucratic handservants, or little hands ('petites mains'), of neoliberalism is of particular concern in the second chapter Isabelle Stenghers and Philippe Pignarre, *La Sorcellerie capitaliste: pratiques de désenvoûtement*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005.
[14] Graeber, *Utopia*, p21.
[15] Ibid., p21.
[16] Ibid., p21.
[17] Ibid., p21; Brown, *Undoing*, p139.
[18] Brown, *Undoing*, p122.
[19] Ibid., p123.
[20] Brown, *Undoing*, p21.
[21] Rancière, *Disagreement*, p28.
[22] Brown, *Undoing*, p127.
[23] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, tr. Julie Rose, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p29.
[24] Brown, *Undoing*, p35.
[25] Ibid., p139.
[26] Bernard Stiegler, *For A New Critique of Political Economy*, Cambridge, Polity, 2010. Dardot and Laval similarly refer to 'neoproletarianisation' ('la néoprolétarisation'), *Ce Cauchemar*, p37.
[27] Barbara Cassin (ed) for the 'Appel des Appels', *Derrière les grilles: sortons du tout-évaluation*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2014.
[28] Graeber, *Utopia*, pp191–2.
[29] Davies, *Neoliberalism*, p30.

[30] Davies, *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being*, London, Verso, 2016, p179.
[31] Ibid., p107.
[32] Thomas Diefenbach, *Hierarchy and Organisation: Toward a General Theory of Hierarchical Social Systems*, London, Routledge, 2013, p106.
[33] Ibid., p24.
[34] Brown, *Undoing*, pp28–9.
[35] While it is tempting to speak of neoliberalism's 'sorcery', as Stenghers and Pignarre do, there is also need for rational explanation of this hold. Isabelle Stenghers and Philippe Pignarre, *La Sorcellerie capitaliste: pratiques de désenvoûtement*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005.
[36] Though envisaged by Freud as a joke with or on his early audience, the concept and crude mechanism of sublimation has invariably been taken seriously, including by Bernard Stiegler. See Oliver Davis, 'Desublimation in Education for Democracy', *Stiegler & Technics*, ed. by Christina Howells and Gerald Moore, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Universtity Press, 2013, pp165–178.
[37] Monique Schneider, *Généalogie du masculin*, Paris, Aubier, 2000, pp77–94.
[38] Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, Paris, Galilée, 1974, p11.
[39] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York, Columbia UP, 1982, p3.
[40] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, New York, Fordham UP, 2008.
[41] Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp23–27.
[42] Derrida, *Glas*, p24.
[43] Rancière, *Le Maître ignorant: cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle*, Paris, Fayard, 1987, pp17–18.
[44] Rancière's French draws attention to the implicit vertical axis of value which ordinary education also teaches in such formulations as 'Ainsi l'élève s'élevait-il.', *Le Maître ignorant*, p10.
[45] Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology* tr. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, London, Routledge, 1948, p197.
[46] Diefenbach, *Hierarchy*, pp14–15.
[47] Elliott Jacques, *A General Theory of Bureaucracy*, London, Heinemann, 1976, p90.
[48] Foucault, *Le Pouvoir psychiatrique*. *Cours au Collège de France (1973–1974)*, ed. François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana and Jacques Lagrange, Paris, Gallimard and Seuil, 2003, p65, pp67–8.
[49] Elizabeth Anderson, 'Expanding the Egalitarian Toolbox: Equality and Bureaucracy', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 82 (2008): 139–160, pp144–5.
[50] Dardot & Laval, *Ce Cauchemar*, p12. All translations from this book are my own.
[51] Ibid., pp209–10.
[52] Graeber, *Utopia*, p171.
[53] Graeber, *Utopia*, p174. Graeber is dismissive of Foucault and those who study his work but Foucault had made a strikingly similar point about the coincidence of earthly with celestial hierarchy in a 1972 article on Gaston Bachelard in which Foucault suggested that hierarchy is one of the inherited values most deeply ingrained in our culture and one with which Bachelard deftly plays: 'il y a les grands et les petits, il y a la hiérarchie enfin, tout ce monde céleste avec les Trônes, les Dominations, les Anges et les Archanges…! Tout ça est très hiérarchisé.' Foucault, 'Piéger sa propre culture', *Dits et écrits*, Gallimard/Quarto, 2001, v. 1, p1250.

[54] Foucault, *Psychiatric Power. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973–1974*, ed. Arnold Davidson, tr. Graham Burchell, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p173.
[55] Ibid., p150, translation substantially modified to better reflect Foucault's 'l'apprentissage de la nomination sera en même temps celui de la hiérarchie'.
[56] Ibid., p150.
[57] John Pratt et al., The *New Punitiveness: Trends, theories,* perspectives, London, Routledge, 2011.
[58] Loïc Wacquant, 'Bourdieu, Foucault, and the Penal State in the Neoliberal Era' in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, ed. Daniel Zemora and Michael Behrent, Cambridge, Polity, 2016, p121.
[59] Ibid., p121.
[60] Didier Fassin, *L'Ombre du monde: une anthropologie de la condition carcérale*, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p64.
[61] Ibid., p53, my translation. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, New York: The New Press, 2nd edn 2012.
[62] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–9*, ed. Michel Senellart, tr. Graham Burchell, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p67.
[63] Wacquant, 'Bourdieu, Foucault, and the Penal State', p122.
[64] Graeber, *Utopia*, pp32–3.
[65] On the presentational preference for 'competitiveness' over 'inequality' see Davies, *Neoliberalism*, p35.
[66] C.A.S.E. Collective, 'Critical Approaches to Security in Europe: A Networked Manifesto', *Security Dialogue* 37 (2006): 443–487, p458.
[67] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society,* Boston, Beacon, 1964, p10.